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**CHOREOGRAPHING CONFLICT:  
INSPIRING CHANGE THROUGH VISUAL AND PHYSICAL REPRESENTATIONS**

by  
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**SUBMITTED TO SCRIPPS COLLEGE IN PARTIAL FUFILLMENT  
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**PROFESSOR WILLIAMSON  
PROFESSOR BROSTERMAN**

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“The world is an interdependent, vitally alive organism, of which you are an integral part.

The energy of our differences can produce a precious gift we could never have experienced alone.

When we choose cocreation we end separation—the root cause of conflict.

Choosing to cocreate will transform ‘your’ vision into ‘our’ vision. Support will arise from everywhere.”

- Thomas Crum, *The Magic of Conflict*

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**Abstract:**

This thesis examines how art can support and stimulate personal and social change. It addresses the natural and ever-present existence of conflict and analyzes how using the body as a tool for communication can viscerally represent themes of disagreement and resolution. The work of Israeli choreographers Yasmeen Godder and Hillel Kogan are analyzed in a case study to explore different methods of choreographing conflict. Both works successfully, yet contrastingly, demonstrate how the body adds power and emotion to an idea. Parallel to the research component of this thesis is the original choreographed work, *Ecotones*. The creative method behind *Ecotones* drew from the research and led to a unique compilation of approaches to choreographing conflict. This process and the resulting choreography highlight the potential impact of creating, dancing, and watching art about resistance, struggle, and connection.

**Choreographing Conflict:**

What is the intent of choreographing conflict? Does it serve as a historical reflection, a commentary on desire and human nature, or a medium for people to see things from a new perspective, inviting reflection and changes in behavior and perception? All these possibilities are inherently both political and personal and can occur simultaneously. Dancers behave as diplomats, traveling to different places with the desire to share, pushing their own message, sometimes subtly and unconsciously and other times with a pointed agenda and intention. The choreographer uses the aesthetic tools and production elements that include rhythm, tempo, force, synchronicity, proximity of dancers

to the audience and each other, wardrobe, soundscape, environment, and text to shape the outcome and the emotional and intellectual experience for both audience and mover. One method of choreographing conflict leverages making the audience feel uncomfortable and overwhelmed. This approach is exemplified by Israeli choreographer Yasmeen Godder's *Strawberry Cream and Gunpowder* which is an example of discordant, asymmetrical, and clashing representations of the grotesque and the chaotic. In contrast, Israeli Hillel Kogan, in *We Love Arabs*, applies text and humor to a linear narrative with its own specific movement language that points to people's fallibility and culpability. Both Israeli choreographers are situated within the same socio-political environment of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and dislike the current behaviors and responses to the violence, however, their aesthetic choices reveal different effects. Kogan makes fun of the naivete of liberal Israelis who stereotype and perpetuate systems they claim to condemn. Godder creates a distressed manic landscape of bodies which serves to highlight the desensitized nature of Israeli society, exaggerating images of war and conflict, forcing a visceral response from the audience.

For people not present during the actual moment of an attack or disagreement, state violence becomes mechanized and easily disregarded. News can help remind the public what is happening outside of their localized experience, but there is no formula for how to process and respond. Furthermore, news can be easily distorted and ignored. In the modern world, so much of conflict is non-physical; there is much less body to body violence. In addition to knives, guns and bombs, there are words spoken and unspoken, glances, segregation, and specific acts of economic impact. In contrast, dancing is body on

body, but has the capacity to comment on much more. Both Godder and Kogan show that the body adds power; it humanizes and accentuates people's pain and desire, turning an idea into a sensation.

The world appears increasingly complex, yet when people can apply tools of observation and reflection, such as art-making, the patterns and predictability of nature and human tendency show the world to be simple and repetitive, inviting shifts in behaviors. History shows that underlying needs and human responses look the same across cultures and circumstances. When people want or need something they limit their vision and focus, in order to be productive and therefore successful. Working on a small scale creates visible change. While this may increase success in attaining short-term goals, it impedes awareness of other perspectives and needs which leads to conflict. As a result, there is a lack of self, community, global awareness, and empathy. Art steps in to help people see more. Artists have a responsibility to reveal what is unspoken and to stimulate discussion and thought on personal and social inequities. Additionally, art can be an important tool for community building, celebration, and acknowledgement.

Conflict is unavoidable and an aspect of all interactions: "Conflict is natural; neither positive nor negative, it just is./ Conflict is just an interference pattern of energies. Nature uses conflict as its primary motivator for change, creating beautiful beaches, canyons, mountains, and pearls" (Crum 49). Change is constant and driven by continuous shifts between conflict and resolution. Each increment of change stimulates response and reflection which drives further change. It is a positive feedback loop: as one thing happens it stimulates the other, and the cycle continues. Because conflict is not inherently bad it



“can be seen as a gift of energy, in which neither side loses and a new dance is created./ Resolving conflict is rarely about who is right. It is about acknowledgment and appreciation of differences./ Conflict begins within. As we unhitch the burden of belief systems and heighten our perceptions, we love more fully and freely” (Crum 49). Disagreement exists within a single individual and/or between individuals and communities; it “emerges in the following areas: the split between the body and emotions; between memory and forgetting; the expression of feelings for which there are no words; and the expression of conflicting feelings” (Callaghan 259). Increasing connectivity and awareness of the self decreases these gaps in understanding. It is important to recognize that state-inflicted violence may not have this same ease of resolution and cyclical nature, because there is no interpersonal dialogue. Empathy is impossible without sentient beings on both sides of the conflict. The altercation is not occurring organically but rather is perpetuated by one large, non-feeling entity punishing an individual, culture, or grouping of people. That is not to say that such conflicts cannot be resolved, but that it requires putting people on both sides of the battle back into the equation. Dance recruits people, inviting individuals to retake control where it has been lost to an institution; it does so via a process of re-physicalizing the abstract and impersonal.

Engaging in struggle and learning to process conflict through observation and recognition of the self and others can be accomplished by embracing vulnerability. At the core of Brené Brown’s book, *Daring Greatly*, is an emphasis on the importance of questioning how “we own and engage with vulnerability so we can start transforming the way we live, love, parent, and lead” (3). Being open to new perspectives and questioning

assumptions invites conversation surrounding subjects that would otherwise not be confronted: "A willingness to change eliminates the word failure from our vocabulary./ To change our perspective in a conflict is to move from a point of view to a viewing point./ Embracing change is consciously choosing our future./ Flexibility allows us to stretch rather than shrink in life" (Crum 171). More learning opportunities are created by questioning personal beliefs and inviting a discussion of others' ideologies. Brown asks: "What price are we paying when we shut down and disengage?" (3). She ascertains that examination of the inner spirit is a necessity in order to not pay this "price," a price of dissatisfaction and limitation. Art, specifically dance, can be a positive and productive method of welcoming vulnerability because of its usage and reflection on the physical body. The body is intimate; expression and exposure require trust.

Most artistic representations evoke feelings. Judith Butler's analysis of "torture and the ethics of photography" asks important questions of photography that extend to dance, particularly choreography aiming to uncover the emotional. Photography differs from choreographed dance in distinct ways; photography has the potential to portray candid moments in time, events, and the everyday, to be used as evidence for past occurrences and behavior, while choreographed movement is a purposeful manipulation of bodies in space intended to capture a theme. However, these two mediums hold similar truths about the representation and framing of conflict. Butler asks what the "referential function of a photograph does besides simply referring: what other functions does it serve? What other effects does it produce?... If the photo represents reality, which reality is it that is represented? And how does the frame circumscribe what will be called reality in this

instance?" (Butler 85). For both choreography and photography, it is necessary to situate the work within the social and political environment in which it was both consciously and subconsciously manifested. Butler emphasizes that

interpretation is not to be conceived restrictively in terms of a subjective act.

Rather, interpretation takes place by virtue of the structuring constraints of genre and form on the communicability of affect—and so sometimes takes place against one's will or, indeed, in spite of oneself. Thus, it is not just that the photographer and/or the viewer actively and deliberately interpret, but that the photograph itself becomes a structuring scene of interpretation—and one that may unsettle both maker and viewer in its turn. (Butler 67)

There are inherent insinuations and effects of an artistic medium. In the case of dance, the body carries with it personal and cultural histories distinct to each performer, and each individual within the audience. When representing conflict in choreographed movements it is necessary to take note of these connotations: different people and cultures usage and understanding of the body and relationships can increase or decrease the message of conflict. In Karen Callaghan's piece "Torture—The Body in Conflict," Callaghan notes that "people's bodies and ways of moving express individual, family and cultural movement patterns, which are the manifestation of the individual, family and cultural psyche. These respective memories live in the body and are stimulated by one's own or another's movement" (256). The replicability and the "circulability" of images invites the captured "event to continue to happ[en]...and, indeed,...[to] not sto[p] happening;" in the case of dance, because of the continued performing and touring of choreography, there is also a

timeless nature to the representation and embodiment of a subject and the conflict within it which further alters the perception of the work (Butler 86). When images and movement become “a topic of public debate, the scene of the photograph is extended. The scene becomes not just the spatial location and social scenario... but the entire social sphere in which the photograph is shown, seen, censored, publicized, discussed, and debated” (Butler 80). Setting shifts meaning.

Movement that addresses the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can differ dramatically depending on the perspective of who is making or viewing the material. The identity of the creator, subject, and audience shapes what is presented and its effect. There is much to learn analyzing the choreography produced in and about Israel and Palestine as a result of its complex past and present narrative. Because of the multifaceted and intricate history of people holding claim to the “Holy Land” and defending their rights to spiritual and political ownership, Israel is historically at war. Since the foundation of the state of Israel in 1948, Israel has been a part of eight different wars. Dalia Gavriely-Nuri developed the language of “War Normalizing Discourse” (WND) which describes the effect of the existence of war as a consistent part of day-to-day life. WND “masks, reduces, and even cancels out the negative and anomalous effects of war on citizens' everyday life...[the] mega cultural-discursive code enables and supports the use of military power in general and participation in wars” (Gavriely-Nuri 1). Gavriely-Nuri categorizes war as all military practices surrounding warfare (1). War extends beyond the actual battlefield to the people manufacturing and distributing weapons, the phoneline operators, and the medical staff in cities far from the frontlines. Although there is a continuous environment of war throughout Israel and Palestine,

individuals lead what the West would consider “normal lives” because WND is used as a “cultural creation intended to aid the normalization of life during periods of war. It forms part of the cumulative common endeavor pursued by political leaders, journalists, military commanders, writers and citizens, which is aimed at allowing normal life to continue its course” (Gavriely-Nuri 2). Gavriely-Nuri has broken WND into four common “functions” which have potential to and frequently do occur simultaneously: The first is “Euphemization” which is the practice of glorifying war to be a positive experience in which soldiers have the opportunity to prove themselves as courageous; the second, “Naturalization,” presents war as a natural occurrence, an “inevitable outcome of the laws of Nature. Naturalization reduces the importance of human choice and decision making in the context of war;” third, “Legitimization,” exalts war as a “rational” choice “worthy of support,” thereby, confounding the gruesome inequalities of war like the imbalances of money and power (Gavriely-Nuri 2-3). The final practice of WND is “symbolic annihilation” which is a purposeful omission of death, gore, “destruction of the environment, [and] or...moral, emotional, and economic damage” from the public’s view (Gavriely-Nuri 3). An example of WND is the media’s presentation of wounded soldiers as “sleeping angels” during the second war with Lebanon; soldiers’ prowess and strength along with the capability of the army’s medical team were accentuated, but the reality of pain and the deceased was hidden from the general public (Gavriely-Nuri 3). The effects of unending conflict are diminished consciously and subconsciously by language and imagery introduced by those in power. How conflict is represented deeply affects how it is understood, pursued, and embodied. Conflict is frequently misunderstood or ignored; dance, because of

its usage of the body and its invitation to feel, has the potential to assist the audience in relating to and understanding struggle. When art can help remind viewers that there are feeling, needing people behind a resistance then empathy and problem-solving are more welcome.

Portraying conflict through movement can make it feel more visceral. Dance humanizes the experience of watching conflict. Instead of the more distant experience of seeing people fight in movies or observing people struggle in video games or on the news, witnessing live performance has the potential to enhance emotion and make issues more tangible, countering the practice of “War Normalizing Discourse.” Choreographer, Yasmeen Godder, is inspired by the work of writer and activist, Susan Sontag, who believes that “a narrative seems more likely to be effective than an image...[and] sentiment is more likely to crystallize around a photograph than around a verbal slogan” (Friedes-Galili “Close Encounters” and Butler 68-69, 70). Movement accomplishes all of the above; it has the potential to be both image and narrative based—a physical motif, capturing the beauty and simplicity of a photograph and the complexity of a story. Movement is palpable, a method of expression that encourages engagement. Butler adds to the requirements for capturing a moment capable of inducing an ethical response saying that “for photographs to evoke a moral response, they must not only maintain the capacity to shock, but also appeal to our sense of moral obligation” (Butler 68-69). Obligation is at the root of change-making, but ideally art should move the audience, the choreographer, and the dancer beyond their duty into a realm of intense compulsion and desire to commit. Art speaks to both the head and the heart of the audience.

Choreography can serve as a means of psychotherapy: “In movement psychotherapy, the primary activities are the client’s movements and the physical interaction between the therapist and client(s). The dynamics of the internal and interpersonal world occur in these interactions. The world, both real and symbolic, is created out of the body and takes its meaning from the body” (Callaghan 256). Dancing can be therapeutic in its method of engaging with conflicting material. Choreography can invite moving beyond the coping mechanism of judging the subject or of judging the self. Within a choreographed dance, the choreographer, audience, and dancers can interchangeably serve as client and therapist, manipulating one’s associations of the body and experimenting with different modes of communication between individuals and communities. The interpreted meaning of the choreography is subjective, however, because “everyone has a ‘body culture’ which reflects their individual and ethnic background. The same elements of movement are used by all human beings: space, touch, rhythm, weight, eye contact and gestures. It is the way in which these are used and their meaning which vary between individuals and cultures” (Callaghan 257-258). There are infinite possibilities of how these components can be combined and sequenced.

In order for dance to be effective in communicating a message and commenting on a theme or occurrence, there must be an acknowledgement of the ethical responsibility of the choreographer to research, continue to ask questions, and learn from others and the environment.<sup>1</sup> The question arises of where the line is drawn between creation of art

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<sup>1</sup> Deborah Friedes Galili mentioned the importance to choreographer Yasmeen Godder of incorporating student reflections in all of her technique classes (“Close Encounters”).

surrounding conflict and exacerbation and perpetuation of violence. It is possible to generate a voyeur's paradise where "the aesthetic of pornography protects [the artist] from blame...pornography is defined as the pleasure taken in seeing human degradation and in the eroticization of that degradation" (Butler 86, 89). While blame is counterproductive to achieving goals, responsibility is still a requirement. Ownership of the material and its impact is obligatory because the artist is in a position of power, presenting and sometimes even imposing their image on the viewer. There must be an understanding of the purpose behind the representation of conflict and anticipation of, and then response to, the audience's reaction in order for the art to produce an emotional and empathetic response capable of altering perception and inviting both internal and external reflection and change. Butler states, in a commentary on Susan Sontag's *Regarding the Pain of Others*, that "if the pleasure is in the seeing, and... pleasure [is] taken in the suffering depicted, then the torture is the effect of the camera, and the camera, or rather its pornographic gaze, is the cause of the scene of suffering itself. In effect, the camera becomes the torturer" (Butler 88-89). This idea is complicated by dancing. The choreographer, dancers, and audience can all play roles in the perpetuation of grief which brings up the question of whether or not all art needs to be enjoyable. What people watch and participate in effects their psyche. However, does the problem need to be personally felt in order to be addressed or can it be intellectualized with emotional distance? If the task is to awaken people to something new or that has become background noise, then startling or uncomfortable composition has the potential to be an effective, albeit unpleasant, mechanism.



### *Contrasting Choreographic Methods:*

Yasmeen Godder's *Strawberry Cream and Gunpowder* is an example of unnerving, tender choreography. Godder shared that she envisions *Strawberry Cream and Gunpowder* as a work to wake up society. The piece was created and performed in Israel where, as Gavrieli-Nuri noted, War Normalizing Discourse diminishes the public's awareness of the intrinsic pain and grief resulting from the ever-present conflict. Godder published that *Strawberry Cream and Gunpowder* was choreographed as:

a dreamy world...conjured up by the deconstruction of local war images into an alternate reality, one with the same aesthetics but with new and personal connotation. The desire for this project came with the need to bring to life, resuscitate, the grotesque and disturbing images which have become inseparable from our lives, and in their repetitive nature, have brought us to numbness. A look at local imagery as local mythology, through its flat cartoon-like representation, the work attempts at bringing back these images into a three-dimensional world.

(Godder)

Created in 2004 during the Second Intifada, Godder used a series of news photographs she collected as a point of entry for the choreography. Godder said that dancers were instructed to 'be' the photograph, without political or emotional comment, and each artist worked with a few photographs so that they switched roles: male, female, young, old, wounded, able, civilian, soldier. In this way, the boundaries between 'victim' and 'perpetrator' become blurred, just as these roles

aren't always clear or constant in the actual events of the situation here. (Friedes-Galili "Close Encounters")

The world is not colored in black and white. The landscape is gray and muddled with frequent reversals in roles and actions. In *Strawberry Cream and Gunpowder* there is a nuanced understanding of responsibility and sidedness reflected in the visible shift of dancers' characters within the choreography. One minute a dancer stands with imaginary gun in hand, tension stretched across his figure, and the next minute the same body is victim, strung out by other cast members and pulled through the space. The work is a commentary on state violence, and although it is choreographed by an Israeli and is a reflection from her point of view, it speaks to violence in general because of the role reversals and lack of specific political motifs. This produces an empathetic atmosphere within the theater; anyone who is a part of any violence is both victim and perpetrator and deserving of care and thought. This awareness of multiple perspectives and the increase of compassion can inspire personal and social transformation and instigate change-making.

Interestingly, the consistency of eeriness, punctuated by sobs, laughter, singing, shrieking, and repeating gestures of pulsing and dragging bodies, aims to put the viewer in a trance. Although, there are many moments of interruption throughout that force the viewer to grimace and experience unwanted emotional involvement in response to the representations of gross mistreatment of individuals: disturbing manipulation of body parts, and out-of-place actions like biting one another and blowing raspberries which have been taken out of their traditional contexts and re-physicalized in extremes. Ironically, Godder's desire to enliven in response to Israeli social numbness creates a similar world to reality. In

the land of *Strawberry Cream and Gunpowder*, like in the real world, there are moments of honest emotion and physical responses to horror, yet there is a theme of forced assimilation to the grotesque. Everyone can fall into a stupor in the theater, as in life. But, because there are such irritating and simultaneously stimulating moments scattered throughout the hour and twenty-minute piece, the audience is jolted back to attention, forced to stay engaged with the repetitive motifs of sliding across the floor, exposed body parts, stillness, and animalistic sniffing; they are woken from the dream and reminded of their habit of entering a dream state even during atypical and unethical events.

The choreography ranges from disturbed violence to pained grief. *Strawberry Cream and Gunpowder* ends with three women side-stepping together, singing in Hebrew in an open-mouthed, out-of-body, disturbed manner. The phrase “I’m in love” is woven into their song. The three women fade into the distance and off of the stage, not pausing at the gate with a stop sign attached. They leave behind a mourning couple: a woman hugs and huddles over a man’s limp body. The two bodies stay crying downstage in the dark, as the lights come up the rest of the cast enters behind them, holds hands, and repeatedly bows. The cast exits and reenters for a second bow and then leaves for the final time; all the while the pair stay downstage in the shadows, their bodies slowly shifting amorphously. At last, the woman stands, trailing shudders of grief in her wake, she walks away without looking back, pauses to take off her shirt and continues offstage. The limp man looks up after her and the lights fade to black. The entirety of Godder’s choreography is filled with nuanced moments like these instances of clothing removal (indicating intimacy and corporeality) and disregard of instructions from far away authorities (e.g. the stop sign). While the dance is

brimming with references and unique motifs such as these, what is most touching is the way the work ends. There is so much violence and sadness in the world, people are fighting and disagreement is the norm; a dance created in an atmosphere of conflict about battle does not culminate when the curtain comes up and the cast holds hands, it continues on. The grief and struggle extend beyond the audience, the audience and the cast carry it with them and within them.

The piece successfully executes the choreography of conflict. The patterning of movement forces the audience to question their own oblivion to the ever-present conflicts that surround them. It calls for a re-examination of reality and sidedness. The process leading up to this point of questioning is unpleasant, but functions well in this instance because of the environment and intended audience. In Israel, where there is so much war, an exaggeration of the grotesque reads strongly. In a conversation with Deborah Friedes-Galili, Yasmeen Godder said that the response from the audience varies depending on where the choreography is performed and the intimacy of the performance setting (Friedes-Galili "Close Encounters"). With the removal of the proscenium, the choreography induces a more personal involvement, stirring an increased emotional response. When the work is performed in Israel, Godder shared that Israeli audiences are physically connected to the topic; some audiences have included survivors of suicide bombings (Friedes-Galili "Close Encounters"). This connection invites an intense response. Friedes-Galili wrote after first viewing the material: "I just returned home from watching a DVD of Yasmeen Godder's haunting *Strawberry Cream and Gunpowder*...and it's impossible for me to think of anything else ("Dancing Through the Intifada")." Israeli art curator and critic, Gilad Reich, said

“Godder forces Israeli dance to redefine the borders of sensitivity, themes and even the geographical boundaries it works within. From now on, it will not be enough to make do with strawberry cream. The smell of gunpowder will accompany the creative performers and us, the audience, wherever we go.” Dance about conflict is important because it is a way to get people to stop running away from challenge and engage in understanding and resolution. When audience members cannot get the themes presented out of their heads, then change is already underway.

In *Strawberry Cream and Gunpowder*, the dancers laugh frantically at one moment, while in Hillel Kogan’s *We Love Arabs*, it is the audience who laughs uncontrollably. Humor, like conflict, can exist within everything. There is strength within comedy because it can choreographically be used as a means to induce a reaction from the audience. Laughter is both physical and emotional. Yet, who is laughing? If an Israeli choreographs a piece in Israel about the conflict would it get the same reaction in Palestine? If it does not get the same laughs is that inherently problematic? Just like violence can be exacerbated via choreographed performance, choreographed political commentary can further increase inequities. Kogan’s work is a political narrative about two people “coexisting” and their separate identities as an Arab and a Jew. Attention is drawn to the behavior of stereotyping people within a culture. Individuals who have supportive and caring intentions still fall victim to this temptation of simplification and categorization. The piece has been performed in four languages, French, Spanish, English and Hebrew; no reference to Arabic has been noted. The movement vocabulary is similar to many contemporary pieces. The dancers use carving movements, spinning, and jumping, rolling to the floor, slicing the space

with their kicks. Their movements are fluid and each of the two dancers, Adi Boutrous and Hillel Kogan, are highly skilled technicians. There are also moments of weight sharing, a tradeoff occurring between who supports and who rests, a purposeful and sarcastically visible attempt at unhinging power dynamics. Throughout the piece Kogan

shares aloud his indecisions, chatting insatiably [about his misconceptions of Palestinian culture and about his choreographic process] with a straight face and tons of innocence, and the result is a true standup comedy. At the same time his jargon sends pointed arrows, mocking the idioms of the GaGa technique of Batsheva, using images and metaphors that may sound ridiculous to an outsider, such as: 'look for a way to connect your body to the space, and let the space find a way to connect to you.' (Brafman)

The choreography is scattered with Kogan nonchalantly stating idiosyncratic movement expressions: "I feel wherever we are in space absolutely defines how we should move...The space that is rejecting me belongs to an Arab" (Johnson). In *We Love Arabs*, Hillel Kogan uses the dance world's obscure vocabulary as a metaphor for the conflict, exaggerating the absurdity of language and phrases dancers do not think twice about hearing and using; it is an explicit comparison to the inappropriate assumptions and statements about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that much of the "Left" side of the political spectrum do not stop to say or consider. Language and customs are often so imbedded within a culture they become invisible, working at a subconscious level to affect people's behavior and attitude. Kogan, playing the role of liberal Israeli choreographer, asks Boutrous to paint a star of David on his T-shirt; he complies and Kogan responds by painting a crescent moon on Boutrous'

forehead. Boutrous shares he is not in fact Muslim, but Christian. The “thoughtful” Israeli choreographer did not think twice before assigning a religious identity to the Arab role based on his limited knowledge. *We Love Arabs* finishes with the two smearing hummus, a central component of both culture’s cuisines, across their faces. Hummus is used to unify. The conflict is one of greater national complexities but is also within the individual who thinks they are trying and succeeding but are in fact, misinformed. One could speculate that Palestinian audiences would not find the subject matter presented by Kogan as funny because they are hyper-aware of the reality being presented. There is likely a perceived obscenity to the humor because they are fed up with and accustomed to ignorance. To them Kogan’s observations are probably not original and they are ready for change rather than an exercise in laughter. But, for the liberal do-gooder to be awoken, humor can be a powerful motivator to wake up and take action.

*We Love Arabs* premiered in 2013 and still, in 2018, is touring in Europe and Israel. It reaches many audiences and invites contemplation in a pleasurable manner for people who are either removed from the conflict or who have an Israeli bias. Because the choreography is attempting to be funny, it can be more seductive in comparison to darker more discordant imagery and has been presented to a wider audience than the uncomfortable *Strawberry Cream and Gunpowder*. The piece comments on how people like feeling good; there is a frequent tendency in society to self-placate. The role of choreographer that Kogan plays in *We Love Arabs* demonstrates this through his communicated desire to create a piece with both Arab and Jew. Smearing hummus and screaming are both startling, however, the former is poignant because of its oddity, hilarity,

and meaning rather than being memorable just because it is an assault and a political commentary. *Strawberry Cream and Gunpowder* would likely have less continued success touring than *We Love Arabs* has had because it is so uneasy to watch. Kogan knows this and part of the imbedded ingenuity is how he plays on the human tendency to stay comfortable and happy and go to shows about conflict that are still joyful.

Choreographers know that art steps in to help people see more. As promoters of their ideas they must be tactical. Conflict is a challenging topic but is globally and historically important to analyze because the world is increasingly interconnected economically, technologically, and therefore socially (Dervis).<sup>2</sup> The necessity of addressing differences of opinion and means of resolution is essential in order to push people to action. Any movement and discussion around conflict, no matter the opinion, is productive in promoting conversation and change. Ignorance and passivity create a social stalemate. Dance counters this stagnancy. Choreographers engaged in the political dialogue act as both promotor and activist; they must consider not only the importance of their messages but also the method which has the greatest reach. Influence can be measured either by the impact on an individual or by levels of accessibility and spread of distribution. The political objectives of the choreographer shape their artistic choices. Like any marketer, they choose who they are targeting and this influences their tone and imagery.

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<sup>2</sup> According to research at the Brookings Institute by Kemal Dervis “the strong trade, financial, and natural-resource-related interconnections that have developed in the world economy turn many otherwise small countries, or problems, into global systemic risks...interdependence has become much more complex than it was even a decade ago.”



***Ecotones:***<sup>3</sup>

My choreographic work, *Ecotones*, is an experiment in choreographing conflict. In addition to the written research, the process investigates the power of creating and performing movement about conflict. *Ecotones* facilitated a platform to analyze different methodologies for choreographing struggle through dance.

*Ecotones* creates a world parallel to our own, an environment of questioning: macro/micro-conflict and inter/inner-personal relationships. There are inherent borders between communities; differences are natural and frequent. Within liminal spaces struggle is innate. What results can be negative and positive as people can be hurt but can also unite and grow from the friction of their encounters.

***Choreographic Difficulties, Tools, and Reflections:***

Choreographing *Ecotones* began with complications. I started with a cast of six women and gradually had people drop out of the group because their schedules were too full. A month and a half into the process I had a committed cast. However, I am grateful for the reshuffling of people because it caused me to rethink my approach. I decided to ask men to join the cast in order to create segments of contrasting energies and styles, reflecting differences between groups of people in the world. I planned to choreograph sections for men only but discovered that representing different combinations of men and women offered more variety of interactions. The diversity of my cast invited thoughtful,

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<sup>3</sup> Ecotone: The transition area separating biological communities.

dynamic dialogues amongst performers who do not all normally work or socialize together: 2 men and 4 women; half first-years and half seniors; ballet dancers, modern dancers, ballroom dancers, and an actor. What started as a lot of stress about who was going to be in my piece ended with a solid group.

What I value most while choreographing is a cohesive cast with a shared vision. My choreography demands working with people who are open to using their bodies in new and physically challenging ways. Just as important, however, is a group that is willing to discuss the questions I ask and come up with ideas and questions of their own. Discussion leads to new thoughts and direction. In the beginning, the group was quiet. I had to push them by continuing to ask questions even when they had no response or when only the same two people would answer. I recognize that it is difficult to speak about challenging material like conflict and appreciate how open and expressive we ultimately all became. On my card for the show my cast thanked me for bringing such a “motley crew” together. I think this is a funny statement because we aren’t really a “motley crew,” just a diverse one, but I appreciate the sentiment because we definitely became a crew that really enjoys spending time together.

For a piece about conflict, interactions, and emotions, it felt necessary to have a lot of people involved. I could have made a dance about struggle with only a few performers, but I wanted it to read as a statement about groups of people and the internal workings of individuals and partners within a larger community. To do this, I envisioned many bodies overlapping and conversing throughout the choreography; for this, it was worth the extra burden of coordinating. To choreograph the piece, I not only needed to create and teach

movements, I also had to send many messages and be patient with the cast while trying to figure out a schedule. These management tasks were frustrating but were the only disappointing part of the choreographic process. Once everyone was in the studio and dancing, the end of rehearsal would come too soon and I would re-enter the rehearsal director's role of organizer.

I began the choreographic thought process by brainstorming big picture ideas with my mother related to the theme of conflict and connection, a favorite topic amongst my family.<sup>4</sup> I examined the idea that central to human interactions are people's feelings (desires, worries, fears) about each other and themselves. There are different expressions and gradations of agreement and disagreement, ranging and overlapping between empathy, cooperation, enthusiasm, ambivalence, dislike, sadness, anger, grief, confrontation, clashing discord, and physical and vocal violence. There is typically a precursor to conflict: something which stimulates an emotional experience of mixed sadness and anger, leading to an interruption of everyday flow. Frequently fear can manifest itself as anger. I have witnessed this in some of the men in my life. Their panic attacks come out as anger first; when they are surprised and lacking information they become scared which causes them to outwardly express emotions as anger. Conflict has a lot to do with needs; people wanting to be heard, respected, and safe. Another key component is time constraints, which make people worry about how their needs can and

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<sup>4</sup> My family tries to incorporate the teachings of Marshall Rosenberg's Nonviolent Communication which emphasizes examining and communicating individuals' needs and feelings rather than judgements. It is particularly cognizant of the impact of the different categories of vocabulary: observations, feelings, needs, and requests.

will be met. There are many ways a single conflict can resolve or continue. People can all have different reactions and responses to the same event. Resolution may mean a continued coping with the status quo, which can be a form of violence on its own, or it can be the beginning of moving in a new direction, simply a subtle reaction which initiates a shift in perspective with the potential to stimulate personal and social growth and change.

I discussed these ideas with my dancers from the beginning and asked them four big open-ended questions which arose as I wrote the research portion of this thesis: What does it mean to choreograph conflict? What does it mean to watch conflict? How do the audience and dancer respond to and become effected by different forms of conflict? What purpose do representations of conflict serve and how can they be aesthetically portrayed? Other ideas I explored and thought about throughout the choreographic process are what it means to be on the margins of a conflict and the differences between unescapable and long-term versus short-lived battles.

In the beginning of my choreographic journey this semester, while I was still struggling to put together a cast, activist and choreographer Liz Lerman visited Scripps. One idea she shared was that “artists need to be bold about our subject matter.” This idea stuck with me especially because I initially was doubting and afraid of my choice to choreograph conflict. While I see writing about its importance and researching other choreographers who explore and aesthetically portray struggle as necessary and important, for me, creating a piece about conflict was daunting and difficult, and not subject matter for which I felt I could easily generate movement. Once I jumped in and began to choreograph, I became more confident and created tools and experiments to aid in producing material.

To choreograph parts of both the trio and duet, inspired in part by a workshop with Arcos dance company, I created a score for the dancers of body parts, shape qualities, actions, and words. I generated the word bank by choosing single words out of context from news articles. Examples of some of the chosen words are: 'national,' 'advertise,' 'shutdown,' 'haggle,' 'fatigue,' 'family,' 'business,' 'murder,' 'protocol,' and 'presidency.' I then read the score to the dancers and together we created phrases of bodies in contact, travelling, interweaving, and gesturing to each other through space, later adding clarifying details and themes, repetition, changes in dynamics, and pauses. The news words created dissonance and obscurity. For example, the movement of 'national' was when three of the dancers abruptly marched downstage linking and relinking arms on top of one another, a power play. Within this same trio there were also repeated moments of a family portrait which became increasingly distorted (Figure 4d and c). The score created an intricate framework which I could then manipulate to represent a community at odds with each other and in support of one another. Another method of inspiration which I shared with the dancers were the quotes from Thomas Crum's book *The Magic of Conflict* that I discovered in writing the research portion of this thesis. Additionally, I showed video clips of Yasmine Godder's choreography as a demonstration of a specific aesthetic and movement quality. Her choreography is full of examples of groups of dancers moving together asymmetrically and expressively, communicating and sharing something uneasy and uncomfortable.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Ilbqav0ytk>

Another method I used to generate conflicted material was choreographing a phrase to loud, screaming, heavy metal music. The intensity of the music created an angsty and pressured studio atmosphere, encouraging me to choreograph a fast-paced and syncopated phrase of strong full-bodied actions. I played the metal music for the dancers when I taught the material and throughout the rehearsal process. They strongly and unanimously disliked the music, but I could see a visible shift in movement rhythm and quality when the music was playing. The fast and loud polyrhythms of the band Meshuggah made the dancers' gestures and composure angry and hurried. My original intention was to use metal music and sirens as the soundscape for the whole piece. However, I became increasingly worried that I was choreographing the type of discordant, continuously uncomfortable, postmodern dance piece that I do not enjoy watching; I did not want to create something grounded in violence with the primary objective to shock. I like to make and see art that positively affects my psyche and the audience's. There is so much negativity in the world and I do not want to create more of it in order to address conflict; although, I do recognize, like in Yasmeen Godder's *Strawberry Cream and Gunpowder*, that it can be an important and successful tool. It just is not what I instinctually gravitate towards or desire to produce. My solution for turning the choreography into something that felt more authentic to me, in that it was more harmonious and fluid, was to ultimately use a soundtrack of classical guitar music<sup>6</sup> on top of the choreography instead of the chaotic noises of struggle and anxiety.

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<sup>6</sup> John McClellan and Kirk Hanser – "Two to Tango," "Cowboy Waltz"  
Isato Nakagawa – "Dancing Mountain"  
Doug Young – "While She Sleeps"

The classical guitar music served as a backdrop for the violent and frustrated scenes. Because I played classical guitar growing up, to me this music always sounds beautiful and heart-breakingly emotional. While I recognize that most people do not have the associations and many hours of tears, practice, and listening to the classical guitar that I have, I think there is something that speaks to everyone in the notes' clarity and softness; the sound moves the body in a deep and sensitive manner. I used to play the second song, *Cowboy Waltz*, which begins as the dancer in green pushes her way out of an inwardly rotating clump and screams her anguish, dreams and demands through a phrase of large, staccato arm and leg gesturing and smooth swinging. She dances with an impatient desperate need to be seen and heard, like a child losing her temper (Figure 4e). In her head the dancer is still listening to the heavy metal, but we only hear the notes to the ballad of *Cowboy Waltz*, a story about a wife waiting for her husband to come home not knowing that her husband has frozen to death. The dancer reflected on this moment sharing:

there was a big contrast in my personal sensations when performing that part of the dance because I would be hearing the slower, softer guitar music, but the memory of the loud and tense music from rehearsal would still permeate my thoughts while dancing...which made me feel as anxious and stressed out as before [(during rehearsal when the metal music was playing)].

Once we started dancing with the guitar music, I became more and more excited about the direction the choreography was taking. All of the pieces began to flow together.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> My style of choreographing is to create many separate dance fragments and then to later go in and combine and overlap them with each other.

Depth was added to the message and choreography because of the contrasting sound and movement worlds. What was happening in the dancing and the music had many moments of dissonance and opposition but also instances and even whole sections of synchronicity.

*Ecotones' Sections:*

*Ecotones* begins with all six dancers standing on the edge of the apron (Figure 4a). The lights come up and they all start to expressively and loudly move. I worked with each individual to develop an upper, lower, and combined full-body gesture phrase. The intent behind this opening is that each dancer stares out into the audience and has a movement-based conversation: a loud and pleading sentence dictating their personal desires and distresses. An added component signaling frustration and impatience are sounds of stomping feet on the wooden floor and the smacking of body parts against each other. I placed the dancers on the apron in order to diminish the space between audience and movers. Having the performers begin as close to the audience as possible while still being on stage increases the connection between the world of the stage and dancers and the “real” world of the audience. I wanted to highlight that the choreography is about people, relationships, and group dynamics, and beginning *Ecotones* by encroaching on the audience’s space serves as an invitation to participate emotionally. One of the performers told me that on opening night he was staring directly at a woman in the third row who jolted when she looked up and made eye contact with him.

One by one the dancers retreat onto the stage and end up in a formation with each dancer staring at a partner. Classical guitar music begins as the final dancer leaves the



apron. The conversation continues—this time while staring into another performer's eyes, a body who reacts to what they are being told. The next portion of the piece is a duet: another dialogue, serious and confrontational, with moments of complaint and exclamation but also temporary agreement and support. The partners stare into each other's eyes, hold each other, draw their fingers energetically through space, shake their heads, and stomp their feet. The other four dancers watch upstage in the shadows, gradually picking up on and mirroring movements (Figure 4b). Even though they are not a part of the argument, they reflect and mutate gestures which affect them, resulting in the four performers becoming subtly entwined; their watching and reflecting on the argumentative duet together as outsiders brings them closer together as a group and also shows how the state of one's private world ripples into greater society.

A new idea begins as one dancer from the duet is abandoned and the rest of the group walks forward towards her. She is incorporated into a trio while the other two circle the space. As they circle they contemplate what they see and decide to join the performer who is squatting upstage fixated on what she has left behind. This trio is the section choreographed using words from the news. It fluctuates between moments of breath and pause and accelerated intertwining, holding, and pulling of body parts. The three are a family and keep returning to their cradling portrait pose, a stance which becomes distorted with spasms and tantrums, as longing and desire infuse their beings. The three squatting on the downstage perimeter of the stage are immersed in examining the trio before them. Two of these performers alternate between staring intently at the moving group and watching their peer watch the trio. This serves as a reflection on the tendency to worry

about how other people are perceiving an event. I encouraged the dancers throughout the performance to look where they are drawn to and to really see what is happening around them.<sup>8</sup> Open responsive eyes and focus makes the piece feel alive. The dancers are creating a world; they are not telling a story—they are living one. The performers are engaged: actively breathing, longing, holding, connecting, cuddling, attacking, and repelling.

The mood begins to shift as the trio culminates in a spiraling pinwheel. One of the watchers pulls the performer next to her aggressively, an invitation to battle. They flaunt like birds challenging each other back and forth until the pinwheel overtakes them and the group comes together as a whole, physically connected and geometric, they rotate in and out. The performers are serious and sincere about their spatial relations. This silent moment is carefully calculated, an experience of guarded communal connection. The *Cowboy Waltz* solo begins as one dancer forcefully breaks away from the group. A second dancer responds by pleading with her gestural vocabulary from section one; she is overtaken by the *Cowboy Waltz* solo and repeats the phrase. This dancer reflected: “I would describe it as wanting to be heard and wanting to have agency in the conflict/discussion” (Figure 4e). The rest of the cast is spread out, asymmetrically behind them. They are responding to an improvisational score. The instructions are to become more and more agitated and possessed by the conflict in front of them. They do not like what they see and want to step in, but yet they still refrain. This common refusal to participate out of fear and lack of confidence is an important phenomenon I wanted to

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<sup>8</sup> To enter into the world of *Ecotones*, I instructed the dancers to hold hands and stare into each other’s eyes before each performance.

capture. The two dancing downstage play off of and respond to each other, and finally end up in unison for a few short breaths before the chaos escalates and the sound of heavy metal and sirens fades in. Tensions build and bodies thrust themselves through space. One dancer lies on the floor exaggerating her breath throughout her body; she is picked on by the two men. She strongly and aggressively leaves them behind.<sup>9</sup> A battle ensues where two groups rebound off of each other, fighting within and across groups. Eventually the two communities merge and a tug of war begins, bodies are grabbed in opposing directions as the metal music intensifies (Figure 4f). One dancer leaves the group, shaking her head she refuses to be a part of the battle. She cannot stay separate; the conflict sucks her back in. A different dancer propels herself off of the group only to run back to them gesturing in their faces. The irritating sound score fades away and the classical guitar music returns as the dancers scramble and push each other to create a line.

The final section begins with bodies bumping violently against each other. Quickly, after a period of adjustment where one dancer is left behind, the conflict fades away and the group syncs. Connected as a whole, they are undulating, lunging, and waving as they travel, a flowing unit across the stage. The performers are breathing together, actively supporting and holding each other; they feel the weight of their communal body and the touches of individuals (Figure 4h). The group is in unison. One at a time a performer leaves and moves through their opening gesture phrase, this time as a slow adagio. They all have a moment to separately mourn their desires and pain and express their individuality, and as

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<sup>9</sup> In *Ecotones* gender is unimportant; the piece is choreographed for different bodies and people. The aim was for the roles performers embodied not to be a reflection of gendered stereotypes.

they do so, the group continues on without them. Eventually, everyone returns back to the collective whole. These moments of breakout are different for each body, some overlap with each other, and one is a slow, subtle, and sensuous waltz with back turned towards the audience.

*Ecotones* ends with the group harmoniously and smoothly flowing together. The performers hold each other's heads, wave their arms in cannon, and shift their weight side to side. The movement continues and a siren plays on top of the classical guitar music. The guitar stops and the siren and dancing linger as the lights fade out. The piece concludes with the performers as a connected community; however, the siren is a pointed reminder of the ever-present sadness and inequities of our world. Unity and sweetness is the base from which conflict can be processed and addressed.

#### *Music Editing, Costuming, Lighting:*

On the Tuesday of show week, the music consisted of just classical guitar. During the lighting rehearsal, both Ronnie and Kevin suggested inserting some sort of jarring sound score. Ronnie suggested listening to the radio, news, and rock music. What I ended up doing was taking four songs<sup>10</sup> which were anxious, abrasive, and eerie and cut them up into pieces using the sound editor Audacity. I overlapped and faded these four clips on top of each other, composing a medley. There are a couple moments in the track where an individual music artist (particularly Meshuggah or Portishead) can be distinguished but the

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<sup>10</sup> Clockworks by Meshuggah, Humming by Portishead, Weather Three by Michael Gordon, and the day after 4<sup>th</sup> July by U.S. Girls.

track itself sounds unlike its individual parts. I worked with Greg Jackson, Garrison Theater's sound technician, before tech rehearsal to program overlapping and fading of the new music with the two quieter songs. However, I was apprehensive about how it would sound and felt I was spending too much of other people's time on a risky experiment. Wow was I grateful I pushed through and followed the suggestion. The addition of this music was necessary and meaningful. The sirens and metal clearly created an upsetting world of conflict on stage which the audience could sense and then interpret and see as whatever association or circumstance was relevant to them. My great aunt told me that a specific moment of the piece (when the group attaches and pulls away from the dancer in front, leaving her standing alone with fingers pointed upwards) conjured up a memory of a news article about an abandoned woman she had read about years ago (Figure 4g). The beauty in portraying broad themes of humanity is that each dancer and audience member can apply their own experiences and past to what they see and sense, but we remain connected by global themes and emotions. Both dancers and audience's feelings were heightened by the intensity of music and shift from guitar to sirens and then back to guitar.

For costumes, each performer in *Ecotones* wore their own muted color. What stayed consistent was each dancer's uniformity of shade. The type of clothing was individualized: green pants with a green tank-top, earthy orange skirt with an orange blouse, purple ribbed leggings with a long sleeve flowy top, brown pants and brown t-shirt, blue shorts and blue long sleeve shirt, and a yellow dress. The costuming accentuates each performer as an individual, their own hue and their own identity, but the consistency of everyone wearing one tone and flattering, attractive clothing tied them together as a group.

There is separation and distinct personalities but there is also an emphasis on the six performers as a community. *Ecotones* recognizes personal voices and opinions but is also a larger commentary on interactions within and across groups.

There was controversy about the costumes because I decided to add navy blue calf-length leggings underneath the yellow dress. The leggings serve as a break in the continuity. The world is not so clear cut: everyday there are overlaps and mistakes. While the leggings were emphatically described by many people (but not the dance faculty) as an unnecessary visual irritation to the aesthetics of the choreography, I kept them despite the protest because it is a work about conflict. Adding in an exception to the pattern reveals the complexity and frequent frustrations of the everyday world—it is valid and worthy of reflection when an audience member is so focused on criticizing what is different. The audience gets to participate in a conflict.

The goal of the lighting for the piece was to keep it simple and everyday. I did not want to distract from the dancers' movements. I designed the piece to feel like life. In the final section of the performance, when the dancers are connected and moving harmoniously, the light on the cyclorama shifted to a blue brighter tone, capturing a photographic snapshot of a community and its dynamics, thereby intensifying the flow and the audience's focus.

## **Conclusion**

The process of researching and choreographing *Ecotones* has enriched my appreciation and excitement for my own choreographic process. My confidence has grown

and I am discovering that, for me, choreographing is doable and rewarding. The choreography and research has been an exploration of the many skills and approaches involved in making meaningful art. There are so many ways to speak to people and different individuals do respond to different techniques and moods. My approach to the choreography found a median between the pleasing style of Hillel Kogan and the assertive realism of Yasmeen Godder. The choreography balances compelling harmony and a sense of community with forceful reverberations of the pain that people experience. I was surprised and pleased by the intensity of responses from both dancers and audience members. Many people told me the piece brought tears to their eyes. Emotions were stirred because connection was maintained throughout the conflict. The choreography did have moments of abrasion but overall it was inclusive and warm, and reminded the audience of the value of community, thus encouraging deep feeling. In the final performance one of the dancers was so touched by what he had just been a part of he started crying during the bows. For him, the performance stimulated intense feelings of longing for those he misses and gratitude for connection. *Ecotones* is only the beginning of my choreographic journey; it has prompted dreams of future works and also visions of starting my own collective or company.

## **Appendix:**

### *Dancers' Reflections:*

#### Dancer 1:

Being in this piece was a great experience because it was the first time I got to dance in a piece that was generated by the dancers in response to the ideas that the choreographer had. This method of choreographing made it easy for me to create movement that I could be really invested in and allowed the individual energies of each of the dancers to shine through. It was super rewarding to put the piece together because once all the dancers found their choreography and became invested in what was going on, it felt like there was a small community within the dance, which also tied into the theme of conflict between and within communities.

#### Dancer 2:

I thought it was interesting to generate movement without having set music that you knew you were going to use in the piece. I feel like this allowed for more freedom in what movement we used. However, using specific music for inspiration for movement (the heavy metal for the heavy metal phrase) and then setting that movement to different music, music that really contrasted with the movement (the guitar music), added to [the] piece and the idea of conflict and watching conflict. The juxtaposition of the music and movement is a conflict in and of itself. Later, when the sirens and heavy metal comes into the music, courtesy of DJ Rachel, then it seems like the violent movement that the dancers perform is more in sync with the more chaotic music (is this the beginning of reaching the



semi-harmony that is seen at the end of the piece? When the movement begins to match up with the music?).

Performing this piece was a real journey each time. Because the content was generated from personal places (i.e. the gesture phrases when we imagined heated/intense conversations; the duet where we created movements based on our own associations with specific words like “president” or “protocol” or “economy”; your choreography, specifically instances where dancers interact with each other and really connect/see each other) the piece was emotional and I feel like the audience felt that as well. The fade out of the lights at the end, and the fact that we continue to move in the fade out, is representative of conversations and conflict that we observe in our world. There are twists, turns, and bumps in the road in interactions between individuals and groups. Your piece reflects that; there is stillness at times, there is conflict/violence, there is peace/harmony, there is passiveness (watchers vs. watched), and there is breaking away from others.

Dancer 3:

I particularly enjoyed the process of creating the trio when you gave us certain words to emulate or different parts of the body to move and left the actual movement up to the dancers to create. It was structured enough so that I didn't feel too much pressure when trying to come up with movement, but I still felt like I had the liberty to be creative with my dancing.

Breaking out during "Cowboy Waltz" was always an interesting sensation because I had to think about the heavy metal music while I danced. I had rehearsed it so many times with the heavy metal music, which made me feel anxious thinking about it. There was a big

contrast in my personal sensations when performing that part of the dance because I would be hearing the slower, softer guitar music, but the memory of the loud and tense music from rehearsal would still permeate my thoughts while dancing. It was more than just muscle memory when I was dancing because I could still remember how it felt dancing that part during rehearsals. It was interesting to have to separate myself from being in the moment on stage and listening to the music because I had to keep in mind the sensations that I had while dancing to the heavy metal music. In my past experience, I have always had teachers and choreographers stress being in the moment and really hearing the music, but for this section, it was important to feel as anxious and stressed out as before.

Dancer 4:

wowow the Saturday evening performance was a completely transformed piece. I don't think I had fully believed that I was in the world that the dance creates until that time. I found myself really wishing that the people that I was gesturing to (mostly Cassie [the dancer in green] in the heavy metal section) would listen to what I was saying, jumping harder than I normally would during the little jump section, wanting to put people in the line during the scrambling around section, and really shaking my head and not wanting to be part of the tug-of-war. I guess I would describe it as wanting to be heard and wanting to have agency in the conflict/discussion. But then when we began to do the unison part, there was this sense that the only people that mattered in that moment were the people I was looking at across the circle or the person whose head I was holding and looking at. It was a sense of being, coupled with really pleasant music and movement.

Dancer 5:

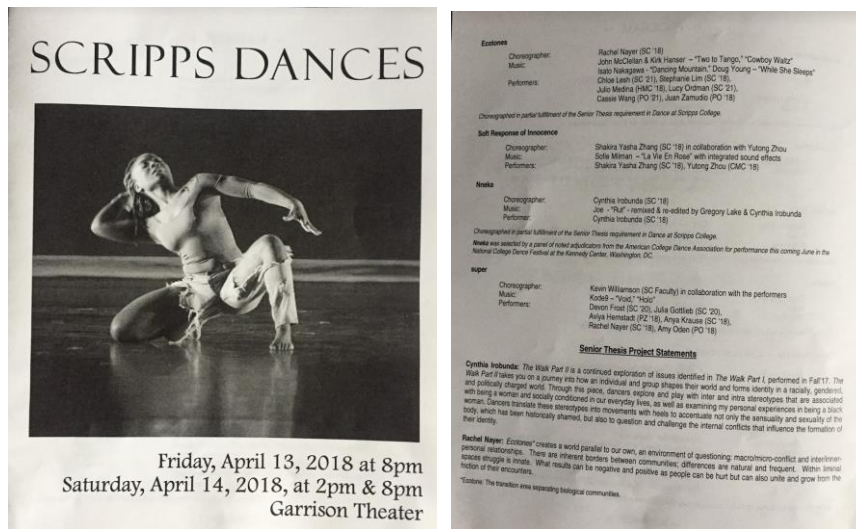
Certain moments of the piece stand out to me, one of them being when I was watching Chloe [the dancer in yellow] as she took in the conflict. I felt her intensity growing as she watched, so that it made me also build up tension eventually bursting into an explosion of frustration and anguish.

Another moment was when Stephanie [the dancer in orange] enters into Cassie's [the dancer in green's] "heavy metal phrase," and I automatically felt like shaking my head because I didn't want another person to get sucked into the conflict. My role in this piece at times felt removed from the conflict as I watched, and almost helpless as I wished to rescue the people involved.

Dancer 6:

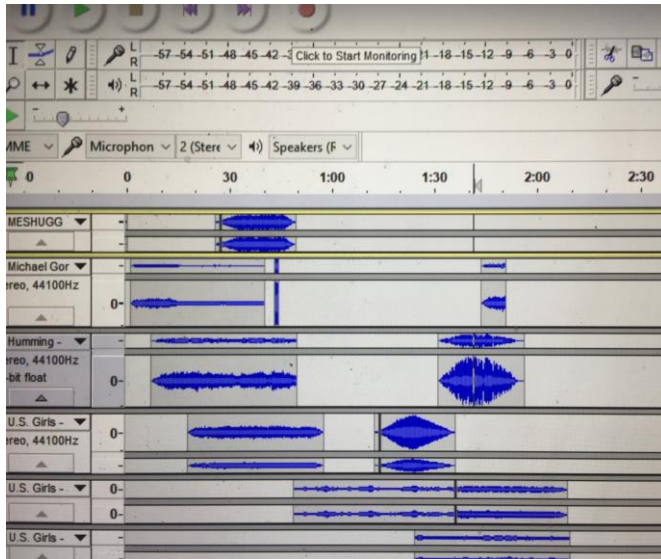
Performing in *Ecotones* was an experience unlike any other. From sadness to calmness to anger, there were many emotions that I experienced in the piece as a dancer. The whole piece was an emotional journey that crafted a story full of symbolism and meaning. In the end, performing *Ecotones* was both rewarding and technically challenging.

## Photographs:



Rachel Nayer was born in Austin, Texas into a family who celebrates the expressive nature of the body. Her father juggles; her mother farms; her grandmother avidly practices Feldenkrais; and her grandfather plays recorder for contra dancers. Rachel's earliest performances include busking with her dad at art festivals and travelling the country as a member of an eight-piece classical guitar ensemble. Performance and movement have always been a central part of Rachel's life. She began her dance training at the age of three and has primarily studied ballet and modern. She received her yoga teacher training certificate in 2015 and is currently an instructor at Claremont Yoga. Recently, Rachel studied at the Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance, learning repertory from Vertigo and Batsheva Dance Companies, and studying Ohad Naharin's movement language, Gaga. Rachel's choreography is informed by environment, form, pattern and memory. Her movement language is imbued with animated physicality and athleticism. Rachel is currently a senior at Scripps College where she is a double major in dance and environmental science.

**Figure 1.** Photographs and information/bio from program for Scripps Dances.



**Figure 2.** Screenshot of Audacity music editing software with overlapping sound clips from heavy metal section.



**Figure 3.** Costuming.



**Figure 4.** Important choreographic moments (photos are labeled a-h from left to right and top to bottom).

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